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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

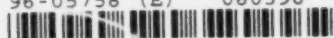
Ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization
and of the United Nations system to support the
ongoing follow-up to the Conference

Report of the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly at its fiftieth session adopted resolution 50/203 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In that resolution, the Secretary-General was requested to report, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session on ways and means to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Conference in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements.

2. In his report on implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/50/744) submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, the Secretary-General reiterated his commitment to ensuring that the recommendations addressed to him were implemented swiftly and effectively and to integrating the gender perspective into all aspects of the work of the Organization. He added that he would work with the executive heads of the United Nations specialized agencies and the United Nations programmes and funds to ensure a coordinated system-wide response, integrating the follow-up of this Conference with that of other global conferences. The Secretary-General's report included an analysis of the provisions of the Platform for Action relating to follow-up at the international level and his views and recommendations on ways and means to enhance the capacity of the organizations of the United Nations system for further implementation of these provisions.



3. The present report contains an update on developments since the fiftieth session of the Assembly. It should be read in conjunction with the Secretary-General's report to the Assembly (A/50/744), as well as related reports before the Commission, including the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 (E/CN.6/1996/CRP.2), the report of the Secretary-General on the mandate, methods of work and multi-year work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/1996/2) and the report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (E/CN.6/1996/7).

I. MAINSTREAMING OF A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

4. In the Platform for Action (see A/CONF.177/20, chap. I, resolution 1), the Conference invited the Secretary-General "to establish a high-level post in the office of the Secretary-General, using existing human and financial resources, to act as the Secretary-General's adviser on gender issues and to help ensure system-wide implementation of the Platform for Action in close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women" (para. 326). In keeping with this invitation, the Secretary-General has designated a senior adviser in his Executive Office to serve as his special adviser on gender issues. The adviser assists the Secretary-General in facilitating coordination to ensure that the gender perspective is integrated into overall policy-making and programming, including in the political area, and is taken into account in all aspects of the work of the system and in furthering organizational links with civil society.

5. In exercising the above-mentioned functions, the adviser will draw upon the expertise and assistance of all existing entities working in this area, including the Division for the Advancement of Women in the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, as well as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Focal Point on Women in the Department of Administration and Management of the Secretariat and other concerned units within the United Nations, its funds and programmes.

6. An internal meeting of heads of United Nations departments, funds and programmes in New York has already been convened by the Secretary-General's adviser. Agreement was reached on the establishment of three working groups: one focusing on policy and research to be convened by the Division for the Advancement of Women, assisted by INSTRAW; another focusing on operational activities, to be convened by UNIFEM; and the third focusing on the status of women in the United Nations, convened by the Focal Point on Women in the Department of Administration and Management. The Chairpersons of these three working groups will meet with the Secretary-General's adviser on a regular basis to promote effective coordination of policy and mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the work of the United Nations proper, including its programmes and funds.

7. Programme and policy coordination at the level of the United Nations system as a whole will be pursued through an inter-agency committee which the

Secretary-General has recommended for establishment by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). He has envisaged an inter-agency committee on the advancement and empowerment of women, chaired by the United Nations through his Special Adviser, which will assist ACC in carrying forward at the system-wide level the broad range of issues covered in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. ACC will act on this proposal when it meets in April. It is intended that the work of this committee, like that of the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development, would be closely related to the intergovernmental process. The work programme on the follow-up to the Beijing Conference to be adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its present session will be helpful in guiding the substantive activities of the proposed inter-agency committee.

8. In addition, it is intended that a gender perspective will be fully integrated in the work of the three thematic task forces established by ACC to promote a coordinated follow-up to recent global conferences at the country level. The themes to be addressed by these task forces - social services, employment and the enabling environment - are central to advancing the role and status of women in development.

9. The proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, which is before the Commission, reflects the new orientation and indicative strategy of the Departments and Offices of the United Nations Secretariat, as well as the United Nations system as a whole, to implement the Platform for Action.

10. In his report to the General Assembly (A/50/744), the Secretary-General emphasized that effective implementation of the Platform for Action would require existing machinery and institutions to "sharpen their focus, set clear priorities for action, evaluation and coordination, establish accountability mechanisms, and use available resources efficiently" (para. 21), in accordance with chapters V and VI of the Platform for Action. All entities within the United Nations are taking action to respond to these requirements.

11. The Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development is the principal unit within the United Nations Secretariat dealing with issues relating to the improvement of the status of women. As recalled in the Secretary-General's report, the placement of the Division within that Department by the Secretary-General during the restructuring of the economic and social sectors was aimed at ensuring the integration of gender issues in policy formulation and coordination, including the servicing of the intergovernmental machinery.

12. The Division will continue to work closely with INSTRAW and UNIFEM. The substantive servicing of the Commission on the Status of Women, including the provision of assistance in the introduction of innovations in its procedures, will be a major component of the work of the Division. Likewise, in providing substantive servicing to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Division will assist that Committee in its efforts to act as a catalyst in promoting the enjoyment by women of their human rights as a central part of the overall effort for the advancement of the status of women.

In this regard, the Division will collaborate closely with the Centre for Human Rights, including through joint work planning.

13. UNIFEM is taking steps to increase its capacity to provide technical backstopping for the resident coordinator system and for other development activities at the field level in areas relevant to the advancement of women. The capacity of UNIFEM will be fully used to provide effective operational support for follow-up action at the national level in programme countries and to serve as a catalyst in promoting inter-agency coordination at the country level through the resident coordinator system. In response to General Assembly resolution 50/166, UNIFEM is considering the establishment of a trust fund in support of initiatives aimed at the elimination of violence against women. UNIFEM has recently completed a meeting of its Consultative Committee at which it was agreed that it should focus on the economic and political empowerment of women.

14. To strengthen substantive links with INSTRAW, the Secretary-General has designated the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development to serve as his representative on the INSTRAW Board of Trustees, supported by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women. The Board, which met in Santo Domingo from 19 to 23 February 1996 and adopted a work programme for the biennium, stressed several areas in which INSTRAW would intensify its cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM, and other bodies and organizations within the United Nations system.

15. Measures are being taken to strengthen the coordination of activities among UNIFEM, the Division for the Advancement of Women and INSTRAW, in their respective fields of competence, based on agreed programme priorities and emphasizing, as appropriate, joint activities. In future, the three entities will exchange their proposed programmes of work for comment before submitting them to their respective governing bodies for approval, as one means of identifying areas for joint activities, as well as for streamlining and avoidance of duplication.

16. The Division, UNIFEM and INSTRAW are presently developing a proposal to create a joint space on the World Wide Web of the Internet to disseminate information electronically on global activities to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

17. In the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, efforts are being made to mainstream a gender dimension throughout the work of the United Nations system and, to this end, to provide units responsible for this work with a solid institutional base. The proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, highlights efforts in this regard in the section on institutional arrangements for implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

18. In paragraph 7 of its resolution 50/162, the General Assembly recommended that the interaction between the Commission on the Status of Women, INSTRAW, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women, and UNIFEM should be reviewed and rationalized within the context of ongoing efforts to revitalize the Economic and Social Council in

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pursuance of a stronger, more unified programme for the advancement of women as requested in paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 48/111. A timely expression of the views of the Commission in this regard would be of great value.

II. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOLLOW-UP TO THE BEIJING CONFERENCE

19. To enable the Division for the Advancement of Women to fulfil its responsibilities following the Beijing Conference, the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, in the context of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997, decided to strengthen the capacity of the Division in the areas of gender-impact analysis, the advancement of the human rights of women, and the promotion of a system-wide approach to the implementation of the Platform for Action, including inter-agency coordination and outreach activities.

20. Efforts will continue to be made to attract support from a variety of sources for UNIFEM and INSTRAW and the other voluntary funds and programmes for their work on gender issues and for the work of the specialized agencies. Further information on financial arrangements for follow-up by the system as a whole is contained in the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001.

III. REGIONAL-LEVEL FOLLOW-UP

21. In paragraph 303 of the Platform for Action the Conference invited the regional commissions to collaborate on gender issues with other regional intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, financial and research institutions and the private sector. In response to the Secretary-General's request that the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions assist in coordinating activities for the follow-up to major United Nations conferences at the regional level, a number of initiatives have been undertaken. For example, the Economic Commission for Europe convened a consultation on gender issues and is examining the possibility of setting up a gender unit to serve as focal point for such issues. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has established an ad hoc interdivisional mechanism to coordinate its activities on women in development and it convened the first meeting of the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific on the Advancement of Women attended by 12 United Nations bodies and specialized agencies. The Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean have also made provision for concrete follow-up to both the Beijing Conference and the results of the regional preparatory meetings held in advance of the Conference. These efforts will be linked to follow-up to other major conferences in cooperation with other entities at the regional level.

IV. STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE ORGANIZATION

22. With respect to the status of women within the United Nations itself, steps have been taken to integrate the measures in the Secretary-General's Strategic Plan of Action for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat, 1995-2000 (see A/49/587 and Corr.1 and A/50/691) into the overall human resources strategy for the Organization and to hold all programme managers accountable. Taking into account cost reductions and the mandated increase in vacancy rates as a result of General Assembly resolution 50/215 on the implementation of the 1996-1997 programme budget, the Secretary-General will try nevertheless, to intensify efforts to ensure that every opportunity is taken to recruit and promote women. An update of developments in this regard since the fiftieth session of the General Assembly is before the Commission in the Report of the Secretary General on improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (E/CN.6/1996/7).

V. RELATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

23. In line with the Conference's recommendations to mobilize civil society in promoting effective follow-up to the Beijing Conference, the Economic and Social Council decided on 9 February 1996 to invite all non-governmental organizations that were accredited to the Fourth World Conference on Women to participate on an exceptional basis as observers at the fortieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (decision 1996/208). The future relationship of these non-governmental organizations and those accredited to the World Summit for Social Development with the United Nations will be further discussed by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations when it meets in 1996 in the context of the overall review of the relationship between the United Nations and the non-governmental organizations.
